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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 005797

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR GREENE/LOGERFO/WATERS;
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SUBJECT: GAZA CROSSINGS; GOI TIGHTENS INSPECTIONS OF GOODS
AT KARNI; INTRODUCES NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR WEST BANK TRUCKS

REF: JERUSALEM 4403

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Gretz for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

1. (U) This cable was cleared with ConGen Jerusalem

2. (SBU) Summary: In response to last week's unrestricted flow of people and goods through the Rafah crossing on the Egypt-Gaza border, the GOI recently implemented additional measures regulating the flow of goods through the Karni crossing on the Israel-Gaza border. The GOI is applying greater scrutiny to Gaza-origin shipments in order to prevent the possible entry of arms and explosives that may have passed through Rafah, according to the IDF. West Bank shippers also report that the GOI has introduced new registration requirements for West Bank trucks traveling to Karni. Contrary to previous reports, however, these requirements do not oblige West Bank trucks to undergo x-ray inspection at Ashdod, Israel before proceeding to Karni, according to IDF and Gaza contacts. End Summary.

3. (C) On September 22, Major Uri Singer, IDF Command Liaison at the Erez crossing, confirmed to Econoff that the GOI had recently altered inspection procedures at Karni Terminal in order to better detect possible arms and explosives hidden in shipments of Gaza-origin goods. (Note: Karni is the main transit point for goods shipped between Israel and Gaza). Singer said that the pallet height required for scanning had been reduced from about three feet to two feet. He explained that the GOI had been obliged to change the inspection protocol because of the "unrestricted entry" of people and goods through Rafah crossing in the days immediately following the September 12 IDF withdrawal from the Philadelphia corridor between Egypt and Gaza. (Note: DAO contacts with the IDF indicate that Egypt-Gaza crossings have been stopped in many locations along the border, but crossings continue at three northern points on September 22, according to the IDF. Rafah opened at 6 a.m. on September 23 for 48 hours to allow passage of persons on humanitarian grounds.)

4. (C) Palestinian Business Association (Gaza) Chairman Mohammed Yazgi told Econoff on September 22 that he was aware of GOI changes implemented at Karni. In addition to the reduction in both height of pallets to be scanned, Yazgi said that more concrete barriers had been installed and a greater distance (from six to ten meters) provided between a protective wall and vehicle lanes. He said Karni had been closed for three hours on September 21 while some of these changes were made. Yazgi attributed these and other measures to GOI concerns over what had occurred at Rafah and, as a consequence, the heightened threat of arms being smuggled into Israel. While he understood the reasons for GOI actions, Yazgi said that the changes would further limit both the volume and speed of goods flowing from Gaza. He added that, in the wake of the GOI's disengagement from Gaza, Gazans expect to see signs of an economic revival, including an increase in exports. He said he hoped that the GOI and PA will soon reach agreement on the operation of all borders, before frustrations begin to escalate.

5. (SBU) West Bank contacts of ConGen Jerusalem confirmed the pallet height change at Karni and added that the height requirement was dependent on the product being scanned. For example, a pallet of cans can only be 15 cm high, but the height requirement for some other items remains 40-60 cm. According to the same contacts, West Bank shippers are complaining that they have nothing in writing on the new protocol at Karni and, as a result, truckers have been obliged to breakdown the pallets at the border after being informed of the relevant height requirement.

6. (SBU) West Bank shippers also told ConGen EconChief that the GOI has introduced new requirements for West Bank trucks bound for Karni. According to these sources, West Bank shippers are now required to fax an invoice to an office in Ashdod with the details of the company, shipments, truck number, invoice and bank account number at an Israeli bank. The office will then deduct Karni passage fees from the Israeli bank account and, depending on the schedule, notify the West Bank shipper a day in advance as to when his truck

can proceed to Karni. The new requirements reportedly apply only to West Bank-sourced shipments. Gaza-bound shipments from inside Israel or from one of the Israeli ports do not need to first register with the Ashdod office. We will seek confirmation from the GOI of the aforementioned changes and, if true, determine what impact they may be having on West Bank-Gaza trade.

17. (C) Singer refuted reports (reftel) that the GOI was now requiring trucks from the West Bank to go to Ashdod for x-ray inspection prior to crossing into Gaza. Yazgi also denied that West Bank trucks were now being obliged to travel to Ashdod. (Note: Neither Singer nor Yazgi were aware of the additional registration requirements claimed above for West Bank trucks headed to Gaza.)

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